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By WILLIAM JONES,
RECTOR of PLUCKLEY, in KENT.



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BY WILLIAM JONES

Director of the Asiatic Society in Bengal



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I. **T**HAT there was such a practice as *Confirmation* in the primitive Church, is clear from the express words of the New Testament ; and that the proper subjects of it were those Christians who had already been admitted to *Baptism*. For the proof of which, we need only attend to the following account of this matter, which is delivered to us in the *Acts of the Apostles* —
Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John ; who when they were come down, prayed
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for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then layed they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.* The occasion which called for the exercise of Confirmation, and all the circumstances which attended it, are here so exactly related, that I shall endeavour to explain the subject by selecting the particulars of this account, and making such remarks as are naturally suggested by each of them.

II. It does not appear that the Christian Church subsisted any where as yet in its due form but at Jerusalem. This City was the common seat of the Apostles, who resided there, with the Elders and Deacons, as a Collegiate body; consulting together for the propagation of the Faith, sending abroad occasionally such members as they thought proper, from their own society, for the work of the ministry, and receiving intelligence from their agents in all quarters concerning such questions as arose, and such occurrences as happened to them in the course of their labours.

* Acts viii. 14, &c.

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When they heard that Samaria had *received the Word of God*, that is, that the people of Samaria had repented, believed, and been baptized; it is no question amongst them what ought to be done next, but it follows, as a thing of course, that they sent out *Peter* and *John*, two persons of the Apostolical Character.

Here I cannot help observing, though it is somewhat foreign to my subject, that this occurrence seems by no means consistent with that superiority which some have attributed to *St. Peter*, over the assembly of the Apostles: it being plain that he was among his *Peers*, and subject to be sent out by them in common with other persons of the same order.

Peter and *John* being sent upon this work without any previous consultation concerning the expediency or necessity of it, it may be collected, that the Order and Discipline of the Church was already settled as to this affair, and that Confirmation by the imposition of apostolical hands was appointed to succeed regularly to the sacrament of Baptism. *St. Paul*, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, reckoning up the principles of the Christian doctrine, places repentance first in

order, then faith, then baptism, and after that the *laying on of hands*: which cannot signify the imposition of hands in ordination; for then it could never have been placed among the first elements of instruction, proper to those only who were *unskilful in the word of righteousness* †. His meaning is best explained by his own example, who, when he had found some disciples but partially instructed at Ephesus, *baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and then *laid his hands upon them* ‡, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. From all which it certainly follows, that the laying on of hands was the ordinary practice of the Christian Apostolical Church, and that it was next in order to Baptism. That it was not a part of Baptism itself, appears from the example of those at Samaria, whom Philip had baptized, but had left them to be confirmed at some other time by some other hands.

This matter being so clear according to the terms of the Scripture, I think it needless to enquire into the practice of the first Ages of the Church next after the Apostles.

† Chap. v. 13.

‡ Acts xix. 5, 6.

It is certain that Confirmation was universally observed, and that more strictly than in the lower ages; but instead of being known by the term of Confirmation, it was more usually signified by *sealing, anointing, and the imposition of hands*. Yet the term now in use seems to be warranted by the language of the New Testament. When Paul and Barnabas had determined to visit their brethren in every city where they had already preached the word of God, it is said of Paul, that "he went through Syria and "Cilicia, *confirming the Churches*." His design was to advance those who had already been converted and baptized; and as he had no time to waste, it is most probable that his visitation was official; that he acted in the Apostolical character, and confirmed his converts by the imposition of hands. But whatever ambiguity there may be in the name, in the thing itself there is none at all. So we may pass from the Institution, to consider the persons by whom it is administered.

III. *Philip* the Deacon had preached the Word to the people of *Samaria*, and baptized them, both men and women, and was still amongst them. But though signs and mi-

racles were done by him, it is plain he was not qualified to administer imposition of hands, because other persons were formally sent out from the Church for this purpose: and as the persons so sent out were of the Apostolical Order, to them the office properly belonged.

By this example we are taught, that God hath appointed certain distinctions of ministerial Duty, for the sake of Peace, Order, and Edification in his Church: and farther, that the holiness and other personal qualifications of any minister, are distinct from the holiness and authority of his office. For though *Philip* was a person considerable enough to work such miracles as astonished the *Samaritans*, and procured him the good opinion of *Simon Magus* himself, he had no Right to administer Confirmation. And if Confirmation was proper to the Apostles in the first age of the Church, it is now proper to a Bishop. For Bishops have succeeded to that Character with which the Apostles were invested; at least, to those parts of their Character which are necessary for the Church in the latter times. Through all the intermediate ages down to the Reformation, the Christian Society has been governed

verned by ministers of three different Orders, with the names of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons. A Church without a Bishop was never heard of till the fifteenth Century; when some Protestants, who were willing to shake off the errors of Rome, and thought they could reform on no other terms but those of Presbytery, pleaded necessity in excuse for the defect. The Scripture shews us what the government of the Church ought to be by shewing us what it was. For a fact or precedent, where the example is authoritative, may be depended upon with greater certainty than a verbal distinction. Words are liable to different meanings; and an artful man can mold them into so many forms, and invest them with such a cloud of Criticism, that they shall have no discernible meaning at all. The fact I speak of, is the government of the Church by three Orders of Ministers, at its first Establishment. The twelve Apostles were first ordained by Christ himself out of the number of his Disciples; of whom he *chose twelve*, and *named them Apostles*; accommodating their number to the primitive partition of the Church of Israel. After these he appointed *other seventy* also, who

were sent out with a ministerial Character, but were inferior to the Apostles, both in name and authority: for the Apostles, even after their ordination, are frequently called by the general name of *Disciples*; but it does not appear that any of the *seventy* were ever called by the name of *Apostles*. This Appellation was restrained to the twelve who were first appointed; and none other could be intitled to the name, till they were formally invested with the office. Accordingly it appears, that when the traitor Judas was gone to his own place, and the Apostles were reduced to Eleven, two persons were set apart from the disciples as candidates, and one of them taken by lot to the Apostolical office. The solemnity of this appointment would have been unnecessary and vain, unless the Apostles were distinguished to a superiority above the other disciples.

As the business of the Christian Society increased upon the hands of its ministers, *seven* more were ordained; who in respect of their superintending the distribution of ecclesiastical charities, were called *deacons*; and in respect of their office as teachers of those converts to whom they administered the

the sacrament of Baptism, were called *Evangelists*.

By the most early constitution of the Christian Church, it was committed to the ministry of three different orders, not yet so exactly ascertained by their names as in the succeeding ages, but always distinct in office and authority. We are not to suppose that these three orders were a novel institution, peculiar to the Christian Church; but rather a translation of the three essential parts of the ministry from the Priesthood under the Law to the ministry of the New Testament*.

Such was the form of the Church in every city and region, till it was interrupted by the encroachments of the Bishop of Rome. Other Bishops had exercised such an authority only, and in such a form as the Scripture itself had delivered down to them. And this case is so plain, that *Calvin* himself could not but allow, that the *ancient Bishops had invented no other form of governing the Church, but such as the Lord had prescribed by his own word*†. So that a Church which preserves this form by suc-

* Consult *Bp. Overall* Book ii. chap. 6.

† *Calvin Inst.* lib. iv. cap. 4. sec. 4.

cession, and administers Confirmation by the first of the orders above mentioned, is according to the Apostolical pattern, our enemies themselves being judges. This being now clear, as to the persons whose office it is to administer Confirmation ; we must enquire who are the persons proper to receive it.

IV. When the Apostles heard that Samaria had *received the Word of God*, they sent Peter and John to lay their hands upon them : therefore they who have *received the Word of God* are the proper subjects of Confirmation. By receiving the word of God, the case itself instructs us we are here to understand the taking upon themselves the Christian profession in baptism ; and baptism includes *faith* and *repentance*. He that perseveres in his repentance, retains his faith, and has a competent knowledge of the Word of God, is qualified for the farther endowments of divine grace. If the Apostles when they visited Samaria, or any other of the first Churches, found therein persons who had departed from the conditions of their baptism, without question they regarded such persons as utterly unfit for the imposition of hands. This was the case of
Simon,

Simon, a man of a vain worldly spirit, who neither understood nor relished the purity of the Gospel, and was therefore declared to have *neither part nor lot in that matter*.

V. The circumstances of the Church being now so different from what they were formerly, it will be a matter of some difficulty to explain the *benefit* of Confirmation. In the Apostolical age, the benefit in very many who received it, was immediate and conspicuous ; because other ends were to be served besides the progress of private persons in the Christian life. While the Church was surrounded with heathen unbelievers, extraordinary powers were required for their conversion: with which view, the gifts of miracles, and of speaking with tongues, were communicated by the laying on of hands. In those days, the members of the Church were not only endued with such grace as operated inwardly upon their affections for the retaining of them in the ways of Truth and Holiness, but with such power likewise as manifested itself outwardly to the senses of men, and thereby led them to consider and assent to a Religion so miraculously attested. Their prejudice was too great to be conquered by

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the force of Reason. The internal merits of the Gospel, and the native excellence of Truth, would have no effect on those who were incapable of discerning them. Therefore God in his great mercy condescended to the shorter method of leading their Reason and Philosophy captive, by operating upon them through the medium of their bodily senses. But when the Gospel was spread abroad in the world, and children were every where trained up under Christian parents, these extraordinary powers became unnecessary, and were consequently withdrawn. A wrong education hath such an influence upon the mind, that many persons are rendered proof against miracles and all the demonstrations which the Power and Wisdom of God can present to them. It has such an effect upon the faculties, that a good-natured man will be soured into malice and cruelty, a learned man (though surrounded with light) will be groping in darkness, and a sensible man will talk like an idiot. When this grand obstacle is removed, and people are no longer brought up to heathenism, the work of conversion may be left to Education; the mind of a child will imbibe what is offered; and as it

it grows to maturity, Reason will be able to maintain what simplicity received.

On these considerations, it is not to be wondered at, that the extraordinary powers which attended Confirmation were discontinued after the establishment of Christianity, and nothing retained but those internal powers which were always requisite for the salvation of individuals, and were therefore conferred at the same time with the others. The Grace of God to dispel the darkness of the understanding, and restrain the forwardness of passion, was as necessary to those who were confirmed by *St. Peter*, *St. John*, or *St. Paul*, as to those who are confirmed in this latter Age of the Church; and therefore it is equally communicated in all times. What though the greatness of the Apostolical character may now be sunk in the eyes of those who know not how to distinguish between times and seasons; yet God, who promised to be with his Apostles to the end of the world, will not be wanting to his promise, nor leave his Church without such helps as are necessary toward the perfecting and saving of its Members. Wherefore we may safely depend upon it, that the benefit of Confirmation to the faithful receiver is as

real as that of baptism; though it is not subject, in either case, to immediate observation. A learned Author, who was a man of great piety, had much experience of the world, and never was in any degree addicted to Enthusiasm, assured me, that in the course of his life, he had met with persons troubled in their consciences, who had opened to him the state of their minds, though he was not a Clergyman. It was his custom to ask such, whether they had been Confirmed? If they answered in the negative, he advised them not to defer it any longer: and said he had been witness to an happy change in several instances. It does by no means follow from this relation, that I think signs and wonders are to be expected from the present Governors of the Church. For Confirmation is one of the ordinary means of Grace, and if it is found in some cases to answer the purpose intended, the effect is as properly within the common sphere of the Christian œconomy, as the increase of a plant from the operation of the Elements is within the common course of Nature. If the Sun were to shine, the clouds to send down rain, the winds to vary according to their season, and notwithstanding

standing all these advantages nothing should be found to grow, it would be more wonderful than any thing we have yet observed: and it would not be less wonderful, if the Institutions of God were to do no good in his Church. What? shall God establish the means of Grace amongst us, and shall no benefit attend them? Shall he confer his grace to strengthen the mind, and shall the mind be no stronger with it than without it? Doth God amuse his people with forms which have no power, and shadows which have no corresponding substance? This would be more incredible, because more opposite to the nature of God, and contradictory to Reason, than any thing that ever was or will be believed concerning an Efficacy in the Christian Institutions. To those indeed who expected nothing from them, they always were lifeless and ineffectual. The Jews, who were such only in outward profession, reduced their Law to a dead Letter; and Christians of the like spirit reduce the Gospel to an insignificant Ceremony. The Enthusiast boasts of finding a shorter road to the Grace of God without condescending to the use of the means; and the squeamish improver of the Christian Mysteries

Myſteries is aſhamed of the Form, unleſs you give him leave to ſuppoſe that it is voided of the Power. But the rational Believer takes a middle way between them, neither deſpiſing the form nor denying the power of it.

Yet we muſt be careful not to carry things beyond their line: we muſt diſtinguiſh between the ordinary and extraordinary influences of the Holy Spirit.

In the beginning of the Goſpel, when the hearts of the diſobedient were to be turned to the wiſdom of the juſt, and a people was to be prepared for the Lord, the progreſs was rapid, and the effects of the Spirit were viſible and immediate. At the Formation of the World, when things were riſing out of the Chaos, the Earth was haſtily furniſhed with all its productions. Herbs were in ſeed, Trees had their fruits upon them, Animals had their full ſtature, and man was arrived at maturity, in the ſpace of a ſingle day. But now, under the ſettled laws of Nature, all things are carried on ſo ſilently and ſlowly, that to vulgar Eyes they ſeem to ſtand ſtill. The Sun and Moon in the heavens, the verdure of the Spring, the fruits of the Autumn; all are progreſſive in every moment; but while we
look

look upon them their motion is insensible. So the progress of Grace, like that of nature, is not all at once, but by degrees, with a motion imperceptible to the Eyes. Yet both are real. The God who conducts the system of physical causes in such a manner as to satisfy the expectations of the Philosophical Observer, will not disappoint those who look up to him, according to his own direction, for things of much higher importance.

VI. The outward sign or form of Confirmation is the last thing described to us in that account, upon which I have been making these Remarks. We are told, that when *Peter* and *John* had first *prayed for* the Samaritan converts, they *laid their hands on them*, and they received the Holy Ghost. We rarely or never meet with any instance of a gift communicated from God to man without some external sign to illustrate the nature of it and assure us of its reality. The water in Baptism, and the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, are applied with this intention; and the application is so strict and proper, that the whole visible world cannot supply us with any other signs so accommodated to the nature

of the things signified. The *laying on of hands*, as a sign, is not restrained to Confirmation, but common to Ordination, and to other occasions, to denote the power and authority of God. *Moses* laid his hands upon the head of *Joshua* when he gave him a commission to succeed as Prophet, Pastor, and Captain, to the people of Israel. The Apostles used the same Form when they healed the sick; and our blessed Saviour laid his hands on the little children when he gave them his benediction. A sign so frequently applied, and upon such important occasions, cannot be without its proper signification; and a few words will be sufficient to shew what it is.

The *hands* are the instruments of action and power. If any gift is presented, any assistance offered, or any commission given, from one man to another, the hands are the means of communication. The power of the human body is so eminently fixed to the hands, that *hand* and *power* are put for the same thing in the sacred language. And anciently among the Latins, *manumission* or *a sending away from the hand*, signified the releasing of a servant from the *power* of his master. So that if any thing is visibly
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communicated from God through the ministration of man, no outward sign can express this so properly as the stretching out and laying on of the hands of those persons, who act under him and for him in a ministerial capacity. Such a substitution is necessary in our present state, because we can form no idea of spiritual things without the mediation of bodily objects. *Moses*, in his ministerial character, was the Representative of God, according to what was said of him, *See, I have made thee a God to Pharaoh* *. In virtue of this substitution, the hand of Moses was stretched out, to signify the exertion of that divine power which effected the miracles in Egypt. All nature became obedient to the motion of his hand; not for any power it had in itself, but because the Almighty hand of God concurred with the hand of his Minister. When Christ gave his plenary commission to his Apostles after his Resurrection, he told them they should *lay hands upon the Sick*, and they should recover. The sense of which sign is referred to in the Hymn or Prayer recorded in the 4th. Chap. of the

* Exod. vii. 1.

Acts—“ And now, Lord, behold their
“ threatnings, and grant unto thy Servants,
“ that with all boldness they may speak
“ thy word, by *stretching forth thine Hand*
“ to heal.” Whence it appears, plain
enough for our present purpose, that when
the *hand of God* was stretched forth for any
act of divine Power, it was outwardly ex-
pressed by the *hands of his ministers*. Their
hands touched, but it was the hand of God
which healed, confirmed, ordained, and
performed such other acts as were beyond
the reach of human power.

VII. That the ceremony might be effec-
tual, the Apostles first prayed for those
on whom their hands were to be laid. Not-
withstanding the propriety of the sign and
the plenitude of their Commission, the ef-
fect still depended on the will of God, who
expects humiliation on the part of his mi-
nisters, and whose power never was nor
will be at the disposal of men but at the
instance of their prayers. When the Truth
of God is pledged that he will be with his
Church and fulfil his promises to it, this
condition is always understood, that there
is a devout profession of dependence in those
who distribute his gifts, and faith in those
who

who receive them. Our Church, which retains the use of the sign, and prescribes such preparatory forms of Devotion as are suited to the occasion, is every way agreeable in its practice to the sense of the Gospel, and the example of the Apostles, when Christianity was in its purest State.

VIII. The divine Spirit is every where present. *Whither shall I go then* (saith the Psalmist) *from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into Heaven thou art there: If I make my bed in Hell thou art there also. If I take the Wings of the Morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there shall thy Hand* (i. e. thy Spirit) *lead me, and thy right Hand shall hold me.* If we should ask how it comes to pass, that the Spirit of God is in all places, and yet not in all men; I fear the question is too deep to be answered in a satisfactory manner. I am not able to define the presence of a Spirit. My own Spirit exercises its power in a state of association with my body, so can give me no idea of Spirit in a state of Abstraction. When my mind is present to that from which my body is remote, I know not what that presence is but memory and imagination: so that my

conceptions are as imperfect as before. If I consider the natural or created Spirit of the World, that brings me nearer to the properties of the divine Spirit: for the Air, which is every where present, is moving in some places and stagnant in others; it *bloweth where it listeth*. It is the breath of life, and present to all bodies dead and alive, but it supports no respiration in a dead carcase.

The question will be more profitable, if we ask why the wisdom of God, in the distribution of his grace, hath thought fit to make use of the ministration of man? For this there are many reasons. Our condition while we are in the body requires that we should be ministered to in a bodily manner. Order and Decency require, that self-deceit, imposture, and confusion should be prevented in the Church. But chiefly it is expedient, that our faith and submission to the Will of God should always find something to exercise them in every sacred Institution. This method of proceeding puts us to the proof, whether we will trust to the promise of God for the receiving of those gifts by other hands under his appointment, which he doth not vouchsafe to give us immediately from himself. It is thought to have
been

been the cause of offence in Satan, that he was too proud to hold with the consequences of the Incarnation, and would not submit to worship God in the person of a man. It is now a like trial of our humility, whether we will acknowledge the power and authority of God in *men of like passions with ourselves*, whose frailty may tempt us to overlook and despise them. Some object to the validity of a divine Ordinance for the want of sufficient holiness in the Administrator. So the *Donatists* argued formerly, upon an opinion of their own sanctity above that of other men. How, said they, can any man give that which he hath not? But they received a proper answer in few words—*Humana sunt opera, sed Dei sunt munera*—*The works are of man, but the gifts are of God*: he who pretends to confer them from himself mistakes the nature of his commission and profanely assumes that honour which belongs to God only.

IX. I have not insisted on this distinction, as if I thought the Clergy of the Church of England were more in need of it than any other Class of Ministers in the Church. If any are not as they should be, may God make them better: but upon the whole I
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suppose we may stand the comparison with any other Society this day in the world. And I trust, that the same God, who, when the Earth was filled with violence in the days of Noah, protected that righteous man in the building of an Ark to the saving of his house, when he was surrounded with reprobates, as ready to pull it to pieces or set fire to it as he was to build it; that the same God, I say, however wickedness and infidelity may increase in these latter days, will interpose for the government and preservation of this Church, that his people may receive all those means of grace which are requisite to prepare them for his glorious kingdom.

O Lord save thy people, and bless thine heritage. Govern them, and lift them up for ever,

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